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Reimagining Planning. How Italian Urban Planners Are Changing Planning Practices, edited by Daniela de Leo and John Forester, *Rome, INU Edizioni, 2018, 275 pp, €28.00, ISBN 9788876031816.*

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In the first article of the opening issue of the Italian Journal of Planning Practice – a refreshing, open-access source for scholarship on the topic, by the way – Paolo Scattoni and Enzo Falco (2011) claimed that, despite being underestimated internationally, ‘Italian planning is worth studying’. They were, and still are, right. During the last few decades, Italian *planning schools* have been undergoing a fast internationalisation – as evident, for instance, from their growing presence in congresses and boards of AESOP; and Italian *planning researchers*, who where back in the day overly interested in developing a strong national debate, have been getting to the international limelight – one may name established scholars of the likes of Umberto Janin Rivolin, Francesco Lo Piccolo or Alessandro Balducci, but also representatives of younger generations (most of whom with significant international experiences) of the likes of Laura Saija, Giancarlo Cotella or Francesco Chiodelli.

Still, Italian *planning practice* is not a topic of much international discussion. *Reimagining Planning* is, in a way, a response to Scattoni and Falco’s claim. Daniela De Leo and John Forester have done the important work of collecting and editing fourteen stories of planning practice, told by fourteen ‘planners’ – a category that keeps together a variety of actors (see below). Each chapter is told in the first person, and is concluded by a reflection on ‘lessons learned’ and things that the planner would had done differently in retrospective – a great bonus for a pedagogical use of the book. De Leo and Forester have decided to not figure prominently, as they have preferred to write a concise introduction to explain the context of the project from which the book stems, their ‘bias for practice’ and the method used. Indeed, the editors wanted to give room to practice, by applying and refining Forester’s well known method of generating ‘practice-focused oral histories’. The editing of the stories is quite light, and I particularly appreciated how the editors were capable of keeping the lively and colloquial tone of the conversations: the reader can even appreciate the Italianness, so to speak, of the planners, from their choice of words, from the construction of the sentences – indeed, appreciating English as a truly international language.

The book does a nice job in offering a great variety of experiences and perspectives. For one, the stories cover a real variety of geographical locations throughout Italy, from southern inner-regions (Saija and Pappalardo in Eastern Sicily) to middle-sized towns and cities (e.g., Marino in Bagheria); and the experiences of big neighbourhoods in metropolitan cities like Rome (Cellamare and Gnessi) or Milan (Calvaresi and Sclavi). Similarly, the book covers experiences of very different types, from bottom-up neighbourhood organisation (e.g. Gnessi and Cellamare) all the way to traditional processes of regional planning (Barbanente and Marson). An important dimension is the choice to give voice to very different ‘planners’: we find names of well known scholars from established Italian traditions (for instance, Magnaghi, founder of the ‘territorialist school’) but also representatives of younger generations that are enriching Italian planning with their experiences abroad (e.g., Saija and Pappalardo). The book is organised in five sections, each one referring to a different role played by the planners: consultants hired individually or with their universities by public administrations;

planners that have worked as policymakers in public institutions; scholars that have developed action research partnerships; planners contracted to act as 'brokers' among actors; and, last but not least, other professionals that have become 'planners' because of their professional work or activism. Inevitably, the lines among the roles are at times blurred. For instance, the difference between consultants and brokers is not always so obvious (both 'brokers' were indeed contracted by public administrations) – my guess is that the editors intended to highlight the different weight that 'technical' and 'communicative' components played in the process.

The book is nicely concluded by two forewords. The first, by Giancarlo Paba, highlights the role of life-stories, emotions and gender in these planning practices; while the second, by Francesco Lo Piccolo, sets out some theoretical reflections on the long-discussed dichotomy between technical expertise versus political vision in planning. I agree with Lo Piccolo when he concludes that the book gives good evidence that Italian planning, often considered to be overly technocratic and scarcely political, is rather a complex field where planners play many 'parts' in the play.

And this brings me to the 'silent actor' in the book, that is, the assemblage of the Italian planning system/cultures/practices. Of course the 'Italian planning assemblage' is present as a background in the play of each and every planning story. And yet, its main characterisations are never made explicit, something that may have helped the 'translation' (see Minca, 2016) of the stories for an international audience.

This is somehow problematic, in my opinion, because of the way Italian planning is commonly understood. The average international reader – because of the relatively scarce amount of empirical discussions of Italian planning practice – has to refer, more often than not, to common sense ideas that have been propagated by exercises such as the taxonomic work launched in 1997 by the EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies. These exercises have tended to relegate 'southern' systems to the margins, by considering them 'less mature' when compared to central European traditions, and especially the Dutch one (for a discussion of the problematic nature of these taxonomies, see Tulumello et al., 2018). Many Italian scholars have themselves bought the idea of the 'underdevelopment' of Italian (and Southern European) planning. For instance, in the major work on European planning cultures – a field born out from the very idea of overcoming simplistic taxonomic understandings of planning systems –, Luciano Vettoretto thus described Italian planning cultures:

We can observe, differently located in space and time, significant gaps between planners' intentions and planning outcomes, exemplary and ordinary planning practices, and planners' cognitive frames and political and administrative cultures and practices. Thus, the field of planning cultures in Italy appears multifaceted and highly problematic (2009, 189).

By understanding Italian planning as a problematic field with some exceptional planners, we neglect to acknowledge that, after some 30 years of cuts of transferences to local administrations (and planning departments) and decades of political attacks to the role of planning, all ordinary work is somehow exemplary. Exemplary practices alone cannot account for the possibility to find, in Southern Europe, the 'missing piece' to the European spatial planning puzzle (Janin Rivolin and

Faludi, 2005), that is, the design, architectural and urbanistic tradition, which is much weaker in other European planning traditions. In other words, it is my contention that researching Italian planning – and Southern European planning more generally – can help us chart the limits of, and hence give nuance to, theories produced in certain places (mostly Anglophone contexts and the Netherlands) and then adopted elsewhere (Tulumello, 2015; Tulumello et al., 2018).

Against this complex backdrop, I wonder whether, in absence of an explicit discussion of the Italian planning assemblage, the stories told in *Reimagining Planning* may be understood as exceptional cases that do not reflect the actual state of Italian planning practice. But I have probably gone a bit too far in linking this book with my personal concerns and interests. Or, maybe, just suggested some paths for future research that may be inspired by, and take advantage of, the important work made by De Leo and Forester in collecting stories that deserved to be told.

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